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# The "Third Place": Investigating an ESL Classroom Interculture

Xuemei Li and Anita Girvan

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*This study focuses on a multicultural ESL classroom with the purpose of exploring the creation of new individual and cultural identities and the formation of interculture. Through on-site observations and interviews with second-language learners and their teacher, the study presents findings about the dynamics, quandaries, complexity, and diversity of classroom interculture. The metaphor of the "third place" (Kramsch, 1993) aptly captures the nature of this interculture in its fluidity and ambiguity. Perceiving language-learning in this way allows one to look beyond the traditional dichotomous views and approaches to culture and identity in ESL settings and to describe properly the enriching process of creating new identity and new cultural space that is greater than the sum of individual cultures.*

*La façon d'aborder la culture dans l'enseignement L2 varie autant que les cultures elles-mêmes. Par le biais d'observations en salle de classe et d'entrevues avec les enseignants et les apprenants L2, cette étude aborde la création de nouvelles identités individuelles et culturelles dans une salle de classe L2. Les résultats suggèrent que l'interculture est fluide et ambiguë, d'où l'importance cruciale de varier les approches selon les différents contextes ALS. La création d'une interculture en salle de classe implique une négociation constante entre l'enseignant et l'apprenant.*

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## Introduction

This article represents a short journey through the terrain of a specific ESL classroom in a Canadian university. In the first section, questions about the treatment of culture in ELT literature are discussed. The two paradigms that emerge suggest that those who chart this terrain are not unanimous in their approach to navigating culture territory. The next section highlights the specific setting of an ESL classroom in an attempt to gain insights into the creation of a classroom *interculture*. The stories and beliefs of participants demonstrate how they shape this intercultural. Finally, the stories of these participants are discussed in terms of the potential contribution they make to the field of English language teaching. Although this study is limited to the experiences of one specific classroom, the themes that emerge raise awareness and sensitivity to issues of culture in the language-learning process more generally.

The treatments of culture in English language teaching literature are almost as numerous and varied as cultures themselves. Historically, discussions of cross-cultural influences on language learning began with the work of American linguists in the 1940s and 1950s. The work of Fries (1945) and Lado (1961) among others became a "major catalyst" for subsequent research (Odlin, 1989, p. 6). Lado's *Linguistics Across Cultures* was a pivotal work in the area of contrastive linguistics. He asserted that learning a second language was a different task from learning the first language and that the basic problems arise primarily out of the special set created by the first-language habits. It seems that two streams of thought have surfaced from these seminal works in cross-cultural language study. The first emphasizes the contrastive cultural elements of languages, emphasizing monolithic ways of knowing in national or linguistic groupings (Hinkel 1994; Kaplan, 1987; Olshtain, 1983; Scollon, 1999). The second highlights aspects of *culture* and suggests that the process of language-learning involves the creation of new individuals and cultural identities (Kramsch, 1993, 1999; Shen, 1989; Warschauer, 2000).

### Contrastive Approaches to Cultural Difference

In the first, contrastive approach, researchers in the field of language transfer have found that the distance between the native and the target language contributes negatively and significantly to the degree of transfer (Ellis, 1994; Lado, 1961; Odlin, 1989). Differences are attributed to historical, philosophical, and social elements particular to that group. "Language is the symbolic representation of a people, and it comprises their historical and cultural backgrounds as well as their approach to life and their ways of living and thinking" (Deng & Liu, 1995, p. 3).

Kaplan (1966), in his extensive work in contrastive rhetoric, suggested that there are specific cultural thought patterns inherent in specific cultures (Kaplan, 1987). Kaplan's often-cited, controversial research describes the differences between *occidental*, linear ways of thinking and *oriental*, indirect approaches—represented by a spiral schema. Similarly, Scollon (1999) explored the cultural assumptions about teaching and learning between *Socratic* methods and *Confucian* methods, finding sharp contrasts between the two educational ideologies in terms of the goals, philosophical assumptions, use of language in communication, and roles of teacher and students. Nisbett, Peng, Choi, and Norenzanyan (2001) also indicated that those who grow up in Asian and American cultures think in different ways. A more specific study exploring Western versus Eastern modes of expression was carried out by Hinkel (1994). By juxtaposing the writing patterns of Chinese ESL learners with the patterns of Americans, she attributed the differences to varied discourse traditions (Confucian vs. Aristotelian). Other studies such as Olshtain (1983) and Richards and Sukwivat (1983) focused on specific

conversational conventions that are used differently in varied cultures. They found that different cultural perceptions of concepts such as verbal repertoires, power paradigms, politeness, and self-presentation result in frustrations for language learners in cross-cultural communication settings.

### **Cultural Fluidity and the Creation of New Identities**

Recent literature about language-learning and culture has focused more on fluid, less dichotomous notions of language and culture (Edge, 1996; Holliday, 1994; Ilieva, 2001; Kramsch, 1993, 1999; Shen, 1989; Warschauer, 2000). Some have reconceived of language-learning as a "confrontation" of cultures (Kramsch, 1993); a process requiring shifts in identity and cultural affiliation (Lemke, 1998); and "becoming another person" (Swiderski, 1993, p. 8). The notion of culture itself in this literature refers to elements more complex than the traditional monolithic *Culture* as defined by national, ethnic, or linguistic borders. Age, sex, ethnicity, sexuality, profession, religion, lifestyle, as well as many other factors, may exert strong influences on links and divisions in fluid cultural contexts (Holliday, 1994). Frameworks for the treatment of cultural content or methodology must be equally open and fluid. Instead of presenting dichotomous notions in English language teaching such as "target" versus "local" cultures, Kramsch (1993) suggested that participants may create a *third place* in the foreign language classroom that presents a way of thinking beyond the usual dichotomies. This metaphor allows for the acknowledgment of the rich potential in English as a second language classrooms.

This ideological stance accurately depicts the socially situated reality of the individual learners' experience of learning a new language where the landscape and rules of participation are not immediately accessible. Hanvey (1981), Loveday (1982), Kramsch (1983, 1999), and Shen (1989) described the process of cross-cultural awareness and sensitivity as applied to the process of language-learning. Such sociocultural perspectives suggest that the process begins by comparing one's own original culture-language with the new culture-language. Initially, there may be value judgments involved in this process, and the new culture may be seen as strange; however, the ideal "sphere of interculturality" (Kramsch, 1993) or cultural "transsection" (Loveday, 1982, p. 52) may be achieved. At this stage, an individual can appreciate and understand a new culture as a participant and value the *ways of knowing* in both cultures. As Cook (1992) suggested, "the L2 learner is not becoming an imitation native speaker, but a person who can stand between the two languages using both when appropriate [and stand] ... between two cultures seeing both ... in a new light" (pp. 583-584). Moreover, the learner herself or himself has shaped a new identity in this evolutionary process and has helped to shape a dynamic third place in the language classroom along with other participants.

## Interculturality and Pedagogical Practice

What does this reconceptualization of the language learning process mean for English language teaching? As Byram (1989) suggested, teachers must think of the notion of culture in the classroom in "more than haphazard and intuitive ways." Rather than transferring cultural information between target cultures and local cultures, a new approach would aim at reflecting on both by understanding relational ways of meaning. After considerable reflection, a new third space, which is more than a mere sum of its parts, can be jointly created by all participants in the classroom. In her more recent work, Kramsch (1999) described a "pedagogy of interpretive practice" (p. 1) that values elasticity in frameworks for co-negotiating meaning. Kramsch challenged the boundaries of foreign language study by foregrounding context and culture in meaning. She drew on the linguistic fields of critical discourse analysis and semiotics to formulate a rhetorical approach to textual interpretation that encourages participants in the ESL classroom to broaden their notions of cultural identity to create collaboratively a new, ideal third place to develop linguistically, culturally, and intellectually.

The kind of pedagogy suggested in this literature provides a viable and profound paradigm for those working in the ESL/EFL field. The excitement lies in the potential to create an environment that reflects not only the local culture, not only the culture of the individual students, but new classroom cultures in which the teacher and students develop metacognition in the co-production of meaning.

## Methodology

It is evident that each of these two ways of regarding culture—contrastive and intercultural—in the ESL/EFL classroom represents a different ideological stance toward language and culture learning and teaching. Each may have its own strengths and weaknesses according to the locale in which it is applied. The observations and interviews conducted for the following empirical research started with the above-mentioned literature as a *point de départ*. Questions raised through the literature were explored to investigate the effect of participants' cultural backgrounds in the making of this intercultural.

### *Participants and Context*

The class we observed was an ESL noncredit course at a Canadian university. Students had enrolled in this course either on a six-week or 12-week basis. Whereas some students intended to stay in Canada for only a short time, most wished to continue studies in undergraduate programs. Most students were approximately 20 years old and had arrived in Canada to study English within the previous four months. There were 11 students in the class—four

Korean, three Chinese, one Japanese, one Russian, one Brazilian, and one French national of African heritage. The teacher was a Canadian whose first language was English and who had about 25 years of ESL teaching experience. During our observations, four Asian students—three Chinese (John, Philip, and Jessica) and one Korean (Mary)—volunteered to be interviewed. The teacher, Grace, also offered her insights into the creation of her classroom intercultural. Pseudonyms were used for all participants in this study.

### *Data-Collection*

The data-collection for this study was based on five classroom observations over a six-week period, two focus group interviews in the classroom, and subsequent individual interviews with the four students and the teacher. The group interviews were conducted during the fourth observation as one of the classroom activities. Field notes were taken for the classroom observations and the group interviews. In the group interviews, we obtained information that seemed buried underneath the apparent dynamics of the classroom intercultural. In order to obtain precise data, we decided to conduct follow-up interviews after the observations. These individual interviews with the four students and the teacher were tape-recorded and transcribed.

We prepared five questions as guidelines for the interviews:

1. Can you briefly describe your English language learning/teaching experience?
2. What culture(s) do you think you belong to?
3. Do you feel your native culture affects your language learning/teaching and interaction with other participants in the classroom?
4. Do you feel comfortable talking to other participants in the class who are not from your linguistic or cultural group?
5. In what ways do you try to negotiate communication in the classroom when cross-cultural misunderstandings occur?

The interviews were not restricted to these questions; participants were allowed to articulate relevant information according to their preferences. Thus the interviews were semistructured, but somewhat flexible in order to accommodate and encourage the variation in responses inherent in discussions on this complex topic. To enhance the credibility of the interpretation of the themes noted in the data, the aspects of triangulation and member checking were taken into consideration (Ertmer, 1997) during data-collection. For example, we drew data from multiple sources such as field observations, interviews with the students, and interviews with the teacher. We also used multiple methods in collecting the data such as taking field notes and transcribing interviews. The notes and transcripts were cross-checked by the two of us to minimize misinterpretation.

## Findings

### *Researchers as Mediators of Interculture*

Although many written representations of research do not explicitly take the effect of the researcher into account, we believe that such neglect may lead to an inaccurate assumption of objectivity on the part of the reader. Clearly, in the discussion of culture, an inherently subjective notion, the researchers also bring perceptions that are shaped by cultural background. Moreover, in this particular study of classroom interculture, and the effect of cultural background on interculture, our own varied backgrounds provided an interesting opportunity to negotiate our own *sphere of interculturality* in conducting the research. Although we share many experiences as English-language teachers and colleagues, several cultural differences color our respective points of view. Such differences provided triangulated perspectives to the data. For these reasons, we briefly foreground our own cultural influences that affect our approach to this research.

One of the researchers, Li, was an English as a foreign language teacher in China for 10 years. She lived and studied in England for one year and has been studying and working in Canada since 2001. She was raised to appreciate the virtues of the philosophy and morals of traditional China; however, she has openly embraced her studies and travels in the English-speaking world and enjoys learning about other cultures.

The other researcher, Girvan, is a Canadian-born, visible minority (a hybrid of Jamaican-Canadian and British-Canadian parents) who has taught both English as a second language in diverse Canadian settings and English as a foreign language for three years in Japan. Her cultural affiliation is a complex mix, reflecting her family background and a period of immersion in Asia and Europe.

Although we both thought that we were entering the classroom observation stage with broad questions and no assumptions, our individual reactions to the initial observations immediately revealed assumptions and beliefs that we each held as a result of our own cultural experiences and formation. Li was shocked by the outgoing classroom behavior of the Asian students. In particular, the three Chinese students participated in a way that was not representative of traditional Chinese classroom behavior. The discourse of those she interviewed more closely matched her expectations. Although the initial observation of the dynamic cross-cultural interaction in the classroom did not surprise Girvan, who had experienced such environments before, the interviews presented some information that did not fit with her expectations and beliefs. Although she did not think that monolithic definitions of culture appropriately described the reality in the classroom, participants' discourse sometimes reflected dichotomies such as *Oriental* and *Occidental*, *Western* versus *Asian*, and so forth. As a result of our different

perceptions regarding the classroom interculture, this partnership allowed us to value the many ways participants chose to describe notions of culture.

### *General Classroom Observations: Dynamics of the Interculture*

During our first class visit and the three that followed, we observed that the 11 students and the teacher had the kind of classroom culture that supported a cooperative approach to sharing in the process of communication. Students regularly attempted to choose group members who were different from them in either personality or national identity; moreover, the classroom interaction was dynamic and nonstereotypical.

All activities that we witnessed had a component of teamwork, but each time the teams were formed, the groups varied. The teacher seemed to be making a concerted effort to expose learners to the process of building teams and wanted them to be conscious of their individual values in choosing teammates. Most of the values that were articulated by the students dealt with either personality or behavioral traits such as *flexible, strong in their opinion, leader, follower*, or cultural identity.

The classroom interaction was flexible; students answered each other's questions rather than deferring to the teacher as the authority: a feature of most Asian classrooms (most of the students, 8 out of 11, were from East Asian countries). A couple of students were more timid than others in voluntarily contributing to the conversation, but for the most part it seemed that everyone willingly participated during our observations.

### *Group Interviews with the Students: Quandaries in the Interculture*

The classroom observations demonstrated a cooperative and flexible classroom interculture; however, through the group interviews in the fourth observation session, we also heard voices that told us of the struggles of some students in trying to get rid of their native cultural influence. Students described the quandaries they had to face as to how to find their own personal balance between their own national characteristics and the new target culture. These face-to-face talks with students suggested that there was something much more complicated beneath the surface of the dynamic classroom interaction. In order to understand these students better and to probe the interculture in this classroom in depth, we interviewed four learners and their teacher after the classroom observations.

### *Individual Interviews with Students: Complexity of the Interculture*

The student participants interviewed shared much in common in terms of their English-learning experience. The three Chinese students—John, Philip, and Jessica—were all from big cities in China and had started to learn English beginning in junior high school (equivalent to grade 11 in Canada). The English-learning history of the Korean participant, Mary, included the mandatory public high school courses in Korea, as well as courses taken after

secondary school at private institutions. However, their stories revealed both similarities and diversities in their views about cultural identity and language learning.

When talking about their cultural identities, John considered himself as belonging to a "mix-up" of various cultures because he identified in himself the influences of both his first culture and the Canadian culture, as well the cultures of his classmates from other parts of the world. He appeared comfortable in the new learning environment in Canada and in communicating with most of his classmates. He stated that he felt "fresh" that everything was new and exciting. Like John in many respects, Philip, however, thought that he represented "typical" Chinese culture. He went to great length talking about how he was "deeply impressed" by the stories of his parents and grandparents and how his family background had molded his temperament and ideology. He considered that polite manners in the classroom were highly appreciated in both oriental and occidental cultures; and that students should be considerate to the teacher and should not interrupt until the teacher finished speaking. For him, "saving face" was a critical determiner as to whether to ask questions in class. As an example of being very Chinese, he said, "I love Chinese revolutionary songs" instead of popular music. His patriotism could be seen in his determination to go back to China after his degree program in Canada and to devote himself to the "stability and prosperity" of his native country.

Although Jessica thought that she belonged to a mixed culture as a result of her easy access to cultures other than her own both in China and in Canada, she also accredited her family influence. She particularly owed many thanks to her mother who was always encouraging whenever she "felt down." In contrast to Jessica, the Korean student, Mary, felt some ambiguity about her cultural identity. She claimed, "I'm on the bridge ... I felt I'm an outsider in Korea." She talked about the silence in traditional Korean classrooms and how she had felt ostracized by classmates when she spoke out in class. She also felt that she was an outsider in a Korean-dominated class in Canada. She was frustrated that the largest group in her ESL class was Korean (4 out of 11 students), and that most of the students were Asian. Her future plan was to "escape" from Korea by marrying a "foreign person": an idea that was shocking to her mother and to most Koreans.

Regarding the questions of native cultural influence in language-learning, and communication barriers and strategies in cross-cultural contexts, the four students displayed similarities and differences. The Chinese students acknowledged the influence of their cultural background to varying degrees, but their preference and strategies were different in interacting with culturally or linguistically divergent students. John thought that the personal experience of individuals was more important than family background. Being open to other cultures, he did not feel any difference whether talking to a fellow



Chinese student or to other international students. According to him, Asian cultures were "too same," so he preferred to have more contact with people from diverse cultures; however, he did admit that he tried to avoid some sensitive topics such as those on controversial historical or political issues when talking to them. Different from John, Philip thought that it was more difficult talking with other international students than talking with his Chinese peers. The biggest barrier was language, but he did not hesitate to approach a person with whom he wished to speak despite the person's nationality.

Jessica held the same opinion as Philip about cross-cultural communication. She found it easier to talk to Asian students because "they speak slower" than students from Russia and Cuba, and their accent was easier to understand. "The other problem is educational background," she said, because people from different cultures tended to focus on different topics, and this became a barrier in communication. Despite the difficulties, Jessica actively availed herself of every opportunity to practice English and broaden cultural knowledge by talking with her classmates, teachers, and even her landlord. She enjoyed the freedom to ask questions in class and appreciated her teachers' attitudes toward teaching; however, like John, she also admitted that she was careful when speaking to people from unfamiliar cultures. She tried to "respect their religion and politics" and avoid talking about these subjects.

Like the Chinese students, Mary was aware of the differences between Eastern and Western ideas as reflected in the classroom behavior of students. She thought that Korean people were more implicit in expressing themselves and less open to other ethnic groups, whereas "Western people think with their mouths," meaning that Western people were more outspoken and less thoughtful. She professed an eagerness to learn about many cultures. Whenever group work was involved, she attempted to work with classmates from "Western" cultures. She liked European people because "they're more liberal, more open-minded," and so she felt most comfortable in Europe.

### *Interviews with the Teacher: Diversity of the Interculture*

To get a fuller picture of the multifaceted classroom interculture, we also interviewed the teacher, who offered significant insights. Grace had 25 years of experience teaching ESL. Her own attitudes to culture reflected various influences in her life. She said that she belonged to "a larger culture, a shared culture that doesn't really have a unique identity ... the culture of the 'globally aware.'" During the course of her life thus far, Grace had learned many languages and traveled extensively in Europe. She characterized herself as "linguistically sensitive." Empathy with her students was important to her. When asked if her language learning and intercultural experiences had shaped her as a teacher, she said, "It certainly has been a bonus knowing

what it's like to be what might be termed a 'minority'—someone who has to struggle to be accepted." She admitted that it was difficult to articulate how she, as a teacher, facilitated the development of "intercultural competence" in her students, although many of the classroom activities focused on team-building and group work. She believed that such activities allowed students to be "analytical, experimental and reflective" in communication.

When asked if this particular group of students and their group dynamics were typical of classes she had experienced in the past, Grace steered clear of generalizations. She avoided describing nationally or linguistically defined cultural characteristics. She observed that students tended to work with someone who was from a different culture than their own, and in this particular group, students worked with different partners on each of the many occasions that they were required to choose teammates. She believed that age, socioeconomic background, and other factors might be more important determiners of group dynamics than the nationality or ethnicity of the participants. When asked why, in her opinion, the three Chinese students in this classroom did not display traditional Chinese classroom behavior and if this was a trend, Grace responded,

I believe this is a pure coincidence that we have three outgoing, dynamic Chinese students ... they're risk-takers.... I don't think it's a trend yet. I found them immediately cooperative. I really do believe that that's their personality, that the classroom didn't transform them. The classroom may have allowed them to liberate themselves.

Reflecting on her perceptions of the Korean learner involved in this study, Grace said,

Students, especially the two Korean women, are so compelled to do what is "right," and Mary was not like them. She understood that I wanted them to be autonomous individuals working together.... I think maybe she wanted to avoid the Koreans who acted like "Koreans." She finds comfort here ... and readily demonstrates the "interculturality" you're looking for. Other students are still stuck.

As we discussed this notion of interculturality with Grace, we asked about ESL students in general and how willing they were initially to participate in cultural exchange in the classroom. She explained that students really wanted to learn "Canadian culture" and that they were disappointed when they arrived in a classroom of other non-Canadians. In reference to the philosophy of this particular institution, Grace said, "I think the teachers and our program do wonders at changing students' beliefs about how they can learn from others and to embrace pluralism. I think that's what they walk away with. They say, 'More than English, I learned about diversity.'"

## Discussion

During analysis of the data, some themes emerged for consideration. The first is about *the awareness of cultural differences* and how they are defined epistemologically. As demonstrated in the literature review section of this study, there are divergent ways of knowing and describing culture and language learning. Some interviewees felt more comfortable using descriptors such as "Oriental versus Occidental," "Asian versus Western," and so forth. Philip, for example, felt strongly about this dichotomy, often describing characteristics of occidental and oriental societies. He believed that he was representative of "traditional" Chinese culture. Although Mary did not identify with "traditional" Korean society, she said that she generally felt more comfortable with Western ways of thinking, claiming that these were more "open and liberal." Jessica's discourse also illuminated distinctions between Asian students and others. She mentioned that it was easier for her to communicate with fellow Asians, but further stated that she was from a "mixed-up culture" with a variety of influences from both her family and her education. Coincidentally, John also said that his cultural identity was "mixed up," but unlike Jessica, he felt more at ease getting along with Western students. As the teacher, Grace attempted to avoid monolithic cultural descriptions; however, she referred to stereotypical traits of Chinese students, for example, when discussing the exceptional dynamic of the three Chinese students in this class.

The second theme in the data, about the awareness of *the indissoluble link between language and cultural learning*, is in concert with the above-mentioned body of literature. All participants acknowledged that in order to learn a different language, one has to learn cultural values that are different from one's own. They all expressed a strong desire to immerse themselves in the target language culture. All the learners in this study stayed with host families and made use of the wider "language lab" of Canadian culture. Philip, for example, would like to "join the Canadian society" as a means of learning English. Mary also said, "to learn English, I have to learn the culture. I have to *love* the culture." As an experienced teacher, Grace observed that generally international students came with false expectations of participating in a typical Anglophone-dominated Canadian classroom. They were somewhat disappointed with the reality of ESL programs that were composed of non-native speakers from non-target cultures.

The third theme exposes *the complexity of cultural perceptions of each participant as influenced by national, family, individual, and other factors*. The data suggest that each participant bears some features of his or her national culture. Clearly a person's country of origin has some influence on the identity and perceptions that carry into language-learning and cultural immersion. In the case of the three Chinese learners, there was a common sense

of diligence and anxiety about test results: indicative of the emphasis of the traditional Chinese educational system. This anxiety was felt despite their high level of communicative ability. Although the Korean learner expressed a negative attitude toward her national culture, her compatriot classmates displayed characteristics typical of their country of origin. Through our observations and the teacher's comments, it was evident that these students were eager to find the one "correct" answer and to flow with the teacher's direction or with popular opinion in the class, rather than expressing dissenting opinions. Mary, on the other hand, although aware of her national cultural influence, was consciously attempting to distance herself from it. The teacher in this study continually shunned nationally and linguistically defined identities, having been highly influenced by her language learning and ESL teaching experience. Perhaps this kind of mentality is generally supported in a Canadian pluralistic society.

Evidently, another factor that influences a person's cultural identity is his or her family background. The three Chinese learners were able to study in Canada due largely to the strong support of their families. In all cases, the families not only encouraged them, but also supported them financially and made all the arrangements for their studies overseas. Philip in particular valued the effect of the older generations on his identity. His devotion and patriotism were a result of his family upbringing. Jessica enthusiastically expressed her gratitude to her mother, who was a crucial role model in her character development. Mary did not explicitly talk about family influence, but she did mention that her mother, like all Koreans, would be shocked if she were to marry a non-Korean.

In addition to national and family influence, a host of other factors contribute to individual characteristics. An especially interesting case study emerges in the data of John and Philip. Although these two had similar family backgrounds, they displayed different traits. John valued personal experience over upbringing and was indifferent to family stories and traditions. Philip, on the other hand, wanted to cling to family tradition. Although these two classmates got along well and on the surface seemed similar, it was remarkable how different they were on analysis. Mary had traveled in Europe and North America and felt that these cross-cultural experiences had shaped her perspective. She felt more comfortable in a multicultural society. Grace's multidimensional identity was reflected in her attitude toward the interculturality of the classroom.

In tying together the threads from the three themes that surface from the data, in conjunction with the concepts in the literature, we can appreciate that the classroom interculture is a combination of the national culture and multicultures of individuals. The process of creating a classroom interculture involves a delicate negotiation among students and the teacher.

## Conclusion and Implications

This study is limited to a specific ESL classroom, so the findings are not generalizable. It has, however, unveiled that traditional ways of expressing rigid cultural characteristics and their effect on language-learning may be inadequate. The implications for English-language teaching are as abstract as notions of culture itself. Ambiguity is one of the features of the diverse ESL classroom (Ilieva, 2001). The nature of intercultural is not a set form. It is fluid and flexible; therefore, adopting a unified methodological approach to teaching is not feasible. In ESL settings, where teachers face varied groups of students with varied cultural backgrounds, it is crucial to apply varied techniques. As Warschauer (2000) stated, "there is no single formula for how to handle issues of culture in teaching. Teachers will need to vary their approach depending on the particular audiences being taught and their purposes in learning English" (p. 514). Rather than suggesting concrete methods for integrating culture in the classroom, this research suggests that truly learning an additional language necessitates not only learning culture, but also creating culture: a far more dynamic and rich process. Such a pedagogical shift may require the broadening of attitudes on the part of learners, teachers, and so-called target communities. The whole concept of *target* could be reimagined as the third place—the sphere of interculturality—rather than referring to the constraints of the so-called native group. This conception of the goal of language-teaching and learning would not only take away the impossible and irrelevant burden of becoming "native," but it would acknowledge the language learner as a *multicompetent* (Cook, 1992) individual who has the potential to be more than simply the sum of two cultures. This diversity and infinite possibility is what makes the language teaching and learning landscape a rich and stimulating environment for all participants.

Further implications of this research suggest the exploration of the role of consciousness in the creation of a sphere of interculturality. Although some literature (Byram, 1989; Kramsch, 1993, 1999) suggest that teachers must initiate a conscious and consciousness-raising process surrounding culture and meaning in the classroom, it seems that in this particular study, a classroom intercultural was created in a less conscious way. This complex aspect of the interplay between conscious and subconscious teaching and learning during classroom interaction has not been adequately addressed in ESL literature. Further comparative studies exploring explicit and implicit attitudes and behaviors of learners and teachers and their manifestations in the classroom scenario would contribute to a deeper understanding of the creation of intercultural.

## Note

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## The Authors

Xuemei Li has had extensive English teaching and research experience. She is currently a doctoral candidate at Queen's University. Her research interests cover the sociocultural aspects of language education with a focus on identity issues in ESL contexts.

Anita Girvan (MA, Carleton University) has taught English for over 10 years and is currently an instructor of English for academic purposes at Carleton. Her research interests include the cultural aspects of ELT and *sustained content* approaches to EAP.

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